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# POEMS AND SONNETS

By HAROLD BELL





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AND SONNETS

BY  
HAROLD BELL

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1915



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## Lancelot

LISTEN, I'll tell thee. Many a weary month  
Was passed since that sad night in Camelot ;  
Many a fair name tarnished, many a friend  
Gazed with wet eyes through lowered portcullis  
For knights who came not home.

Ere cockcrowing

We rode forth sorrowful, despite the breeze,  
The slanting sunshine, and the cloudless sky.  
We kept in company for one short mile,  
No words being spoken, and when we reached the  
cross-roads

Each blindly spurred this way or that, to end  
Such mockery of fellowship. I rode  
As if from devils, on, I knew not where,  
With no light guiding me, and in my ears  
Her voice for ever calling.

Good sir, I tell thee,  
That day was hell, and every day was hell.  
While the sun shone I jogged along the road  
Hearing my heart moan always, " Joy is dead,  
And Love is dead, and Life is dead." At night  
I lay awake beneath the trees and looked  
With no hope on the hopeless face of heaven.  
And thus I wandered, knowing no relief,  
Till one late sunset, tired, hot, and thirsty,  
In the deep wood I halted by a pool,  
Set amid moss and flowers, motionless  
As the unsullied sky, placid and calm  
As the sweet prayerful days an anchoret  
Hallows with loving service. I lay down  
To lap the water like a panting dog,  
When in its cool depths, glowing like a star  
On a hot summer night, my eyes beheld  
The Grail, unfolded like the Mystic Rose,  
Petal on petal, transmuting all my soul  
From burnt-out ashes into flame. The vision  
Lifted my sins from off me like a cloak :  
Meseemed the pride of life, the love of praise,

The adulterous passion, fled away ; and I  
Wept like one blind from childhood, whom in  
mercy

God has given sight. Then kneeling with my  
sword

Set crosslike in the ground I vowed again  
Never to falter in the holy quest,  
Keeping long vigil, and at break of day  
Rode eagerly to achieve the Grail, with thoughts  
Pure, and no distant calling in my ears.

So came I to the Castle, while the moon  
Glistened on gate and battlemented tower,  
And the long lawns lay silver to the sea.  
I passed through postern, courtyard, banquet-  
hall,

Seeing no man ; up the narrow winding stairs  
My hastening footsteps timed my furious pulses.  
At the top a closed door, where beyond I heard  
Such music as perchance the angels sang  
At Bethlehem, or round the empty tomb.  
I pressed the latch to enter in ; a myriad  
Invisible hands withheld me, and I saw

A splendour of seraphic aureoles  
In countless ranks of awful adoration  
Shining around the Miracle. Half mad  
With sudden victory I shouted out :  
“ The Grail ! The Grail ! ” and burst into the  
chamber ;  
To the altar steps I sprang, and stretched my  
hands  
Forth to achieve the quest, when suddenly  
A heat of fire smote me as I strove to grasp it,  
The encircling lights reeled, and the world went  
black.

Father, I pray thee lift my head a little,  
And quench my thirst—nay, not with wine—  
sweet wine !

I loved it in the old time—give me water,  
Water . . . I thank thee.

All those weary days  
That I lay motionless my soul was torn  
With bitter conflict. Christ’s clear voice rang out  
And bade me serve Him with a contrite heart,  
Promising me forgiveness, and after Him



There came the Queen's soft sobbing, but her  
voice

Was silent. Thus they strove and thus I waited,  
Till, when from utter weariness, I strove

To give myself to Him, upon my cheeks

There fell the fluttering of her eyelashes,

In the old, sweet way. I staggered to my feet

Dizzy and trembling, buckled on my sword,

And shield in hand groped to the courtyard;  
there

I found my horse, and mounting turned his head

Toward distant Camelot.

## Elaine

I DO not know if being loved is sin  
And brings long retribution ; in all my life  
No one has uttered words of love to me,  
Save one sweet, bitter time ; and not to me,  
But to another. And when I think of it  
Sweet strives with bitter for the mastery,  
And bitter soon would triumph, were it not  
For my dear son.

Ah, God ! that night, that night,  
When with old spells and magic craft I wrought  
Enchantment round him as he rode alone,  
Burning with love for his adulterous Queen.  
His breath came sobbing as he crept within  
My room, and sought me where I was ; and then  
I felt his burning kisses, and on my breast  
The eager tremour of his impetuous lips,

As if he would devour me. I had won  
The prize ; but, ah, how dearly ! for his voice,  
Weary with surfeiting, murmured “ Guinevere ! ”  
And many times more, “ Guinevere, my soul ! ”  
And then, forgetting all, I’d think ’twas I,  
Elaine, he loved, until I’d hear her name,  
The Queen’s, and lie all shuddering. Methought  
I paid a thousand burning years in Hell  
For my great sin each time I heard her name,  
And often did he murmur it. Ere dawn  
He slept, and I arose and kissed his mouth,  
Glad, in a brief eternity of joy.

Come near, my son, and let me see thy face,  
For I am very tired, and would sleep.  
Not many times shall I take earthly rest  
And wake in the light of day. My son, my son,  
I fear I know thee not, fair son of mine ;  
Thy lips are firm, thy brow hath steadfastness —  
By these the world should know thy parentage—  
But in thine eyes something I cannot read  
Lies hidden. In thy father’s eyes all men

Could read desire, and pride, and courtesy ;  
But here I see naught but two silver stars,  
Remote, and shining like the moonlit snow,  
Beautiful, and compelling, and very cold.

Long years ago meseems an aged pilgrim  
Sat in my father's hall and told strange tales  
Of a most wondrous holy Cup, filled full  
With the Blood of Christ. Perchance I have  
    dreamed too much,  
For I have seen thee in my dreams, aloft  
With such a Cup giving God's benediction ;  
And a great light shone forth from it to thee,  
Kindling the stars in thine adoring eyes.

Mary ! who knewest all a mother's love,  
And more than mother's pain, hear thou my  
    prayer,  
And make my son strong, pure in body and heart,  
That he may vanquish his father by thine aid—  
And yet not utterly.

# The Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne

(FROM THE ITALIAN OF LORENZO DE' MEDICI)

FAIR is Youth and free from sorrow,  
Ever fleeting, ever fair ;  
Follow pleasure, banish care,  
Naught is certain of the morrow.

This is Bacchus, and beside him  
Ariadne, as he moves  
Triumphant ; Time cannot divide him  
From the lady that he loves ;  
Every nymph her glad heart proves,  
Glad are all and ever fair :  
Follow pleasure, banish care,  
Naught is certain of the morrow.

Merry satyrs follow after,  
Amorous of the nymph at play ;  
In the woods they've laid with laughter  
Snares to catch them every day ;  
Flushed with wine and singing, gay  
Are they all and ever fair :  
Follow pleasure, banish care,  
Naught is certain of the morrow.

Happy are the nymphs, and yielding,  
To the satyrs who beguile,  
For 'twere churlish—ever shielding  
One from love when lovers smile ;  
They make merry now, the while  
They are young and ever fair :  
Follow pleasure, banish care,  
Naught is certain of the morrow.

Hither comes Silenus riding  
To the endless revelry ;  
Hear him as he passes chiding  
All who are not drunk as he ;

Fat and old, as you may see,  
Yet he finds life ever fair :  
Follow pleasure, banish care,  
Naught is certain of the morrow.

Here comes Midas seeking pleasure,  
All he touches turns to gold ;  
What avail to have the treasure  
If the heart be ever cold ?  
What joys for him can fate unfold ?  
Thirsty, is life ever fair ?  
Follow pleasure, banish care,  
Naught is certain of the morrow.

Open wide your ears and listen :  
To-day we live, to-morrow die ;  
To-day with wine our faces glisten—  
Youths and maidens, merrily  
Let us laugh, and never sigh,  
Life is sweet and ever fair :  
Follow pleasure, banish care,  
Naught is certain of the morrow.

Youths and maidens, happy lovers,  
Long live Bacchus, long live Love !  
While the lingering music hovers  
In our bosoms as we move,  
Let us praise the Two above  
With our hearts released from care :  
Follow pleasure, banish care,  
Naught is certain of the morrow ;  
Fair is Youth and free from sorrow,  
Ever fleeting, ever fair.



## Hymn to the Sun

HAIL ! O Sun !  
Glorious lord of day !  
Out of the misty night,  
Forth from thy golden throne,  
Naked and alone  
In the splendour of thy might,  
Appear !  
Child of the morning-star  
And the cloudy-vestured dawn,  
Swift and sure in the race,  
Eager the race to run,  
Come, oh, come apace,  
With glory streaming afar :  
Hail ! O Sun !

Hail ! O Sun !

In the noonday of thy pride,

Shooting far and wide

The life-giving arrows that bring

Sweet verdure over the land ;

Withhold the terrible sting

Of thy death-dealing darts—let thy hand

Shower blessings on corn and wine,

Cattle and herb and tree :

Lo ! the whole earth is thine,

Of thine own we offer thee.

Hail to thy power and might !

Hail to thy goodly light !

Hail ! O Sun !

Hail ! O Sun !

Let all men sing unto thee

Descending to thy rest

Beyond the mountains and sea,

Among the Isles of the Blest.

Behold, the handmaids of heaven  
Have fired the torches that glow  
To lighten thy path below.  
Forget not thy children, but come  
Again from thy nightly home,  
Holy, Immortal One !  
Saviour great and glorious !  
Beneficent, victorious !  
Hail ! O Sun !

*Baalbek, 1909.*

## Serenade

HEART of my heart, awake ! awake !

I am waiting patiently;

The sunset over the distant lake

Trembles mistily ;

The sky is a golden web of light

Hung at the portals of the night,

And fashioned, love, for thee.

Life of my life, arise ! arise !

I am waiting eagerly ;

The twilight over the orange skies

Is spreading softly ; lift thine eyes

Until they rest on me ;

The moon is setting behind the hill,

But the night is fair with thee.

Soul of my soul, come down ! come down !

I am waiting breathlessly ;

The evening light on the little town

Lingers wistfully ;

The sky is a silver net of stars

Cast in an unknown sea.

## Sestina

(WRITTEN AFTER READING *LE ROMAN DE LA ROSE*)

QUEEN of my hopes and longings, perfect Rose,  
Deign thou to hear my rough, untutored song  
Wherein I tell my too-presumptuous love ;  
Listen and scoff not, lest supreme despair  
At the dread thought of once offending thee  
Turn life to ashes, and to dust my heart.

Lo ! here I kneel with ever-quickenng heart  
Boldly before the temple of my Rose :  
Goddess ! if any note should pierce to thee  
Within thy secret shrine of my poor song,  
Let not Disdain, thy page, command Despair  
To lead me swooning from the gate of Love.

For were I once condemned to darkness, love,  
Swollen with grief, would rend my senseless heart,

And from it, like a noxious weed, Despair  
Would spring to mar the empire of my Rose,  
Saddening her slaves, bruising the feet of Song :  
Lo ! how with fear I wound my hope of thee !

Nay, but what boots it thus to sing ? From thee  
No troubadour ere had a gage of Love,  
For all his adoration, all his song :  
On thy birthmorning Dian gave a heart  
As cold as hers—though thou be Beauty's Rose,  
All knights denied thy favour court Despair.

What faithful comrade have they but Despair,  
Who fain would sing to win a smile from thee ?  
But one alone can win the only Rose  
Proclaimed the victor's prize by Beauty and Love ;  
One, only one, can press thee to his heart ;  
There is but one can sing the sweetest song.

Apollo ! Love ! ye Muses ! teach a song  
Unto my stammering lips—so grey Despair  
Shall never find the entry to my heart ;

Then in the inmost shrine I'll come to thee  
Clad in the golden panoply of Love—  
O queen of all desire, thrice-perfect Rose !

Time is but short, and when to sing of thee  
I know not Time, Life, Death, nor aught save  
    Love,  
And Love's imperial flower, the ruddy Rose.



## Song

GOOD-BYE, dear love ; the morning air is chill,  
And the world is very wide,  
And many voices call me from thy side  
Beyond the Hill.

Good-bye, dear love ; far, very far from thee  
I go before the light :  
The mountain torrent needs must leave the  
height  
And seek the sea.

Good-bye, good-bye ; dream while the stars are  
keeping  
Their silent watch above ;  
But wake ere long, lest coming to thee Love  
Should find thee sleeping.

## The Lotos-Eaters

OFT we wander in the woodland,  
Hear the bells of evening ring  
Through the misty lilac twilight  
Of the flower-wreathèd spring.

We've seen many a summer sunrise  
Tint the fleeting summer dawn,  
And the cloud-pools in the valley  
Veil by silver veil withdrawn.

When the alchemist October  
Changes green to golden haze,  
We can dream away the noontide  
Of the burnished autumn days.

In the silent winter midnights,  
When the embers greyer grow,  
It is good to watch the starlight  
Glisten on the drifted snow.

We have passed beyond all caring  
For a world of strife and pain ;  
Happiness is ours for ever—  
Trouble not our peace again.

## Rondel

ALL through the night, beside a stormy sea,  
I followed seeking her, my soul's delight :  
The drenching rain thundered incessantly  
All through the night ;

While I kept ever onwards, with no bright  
Beacon in heaven to shine and comfort me,  
And in my heart no hope or guiding light.

But when the silver dawn came silently,  
I found her by the sea-foam, still and white,  
Whom I had sought alone and ceaselessly  
All through the night.

## Unto the Living

I LONG for thine arms, O Mother !

I long for thy lips alway,  
For these, and for yet another  
Glimpse of the blessed day ;  
Take thou me back from this land of night  
Unto loving faces and home, the light  
Of the sun, and the voices of friends, O Mother,  
For here in the darkness I pine away.

The silence is all unbroken,  
And the night is full of dread,  
And the words on my lips unspoken  
Are the tears I have not shed ;  
The world is blithe, and the songs of spring  
Tarry for no man's homecoming—

Take me home ere my heart be broken  
With my long sojourning among the Dead.

Oh! for the earth and the flowers,  
For the sound of the wind and the sea ;  
Oh! for the hills, and the showers  
On the hills where I long to be.  
Have my friends forgotten ? do I but seem  
As a melting shape in a vanished dream,  
Gone like the spring and the springtime flowers ?  
Is there none of them all who remembers me ?

I long for thine arms, O Mother,  
I long for the light and the heat,  
I long for Father, for Brother,  
For the kindly words, the beat  
Of the wide-flung dances, the laughter,  
For the songs and the music that follow after—  
All these forever are fled, O Mother,  
I am left behind by their footsteps fleet.

Life and the past forever  
Are gone, and here I lie  
Deep in the earth, and never  
Will the Living hear my cry ;  
All that I loved in the splendid, golden  
Days is passed like a vision olden,  
Here through all time I must lie for ever,  
Alone in a hopeless eternity.

## *Et in Arcadia Ego*

I too have known the joy of life ; I too  
Have watched the sunbeams quivering on the sea,  
And the long northern twilight silently  
Shrouding itself in stars. The whole night through  
I have kept eager vigil, till the dew  
Melted in mist. I was a votary  
Of the old gods with a passionate constancy,  
And I numbered not the hours as they flew.

But to my paradise the serpent came,  
Twined round my heart, and at the Tree of Love  
Pointed, and bade me eat the fruit thereof.  
Wherefore I am an exile, and no sighs  
Shall bring me back again to Paradise,  
Seeing that the way is held with swords of flame.



# The New Crusade

1913

A NEW Crusade ! Soldiers of Christ, arise !  
See that your swords be bright. The Infidel  
Hath not attacked your homes ; he doth but  
dwell

In prosperous cities that excite your eyes  
With greed. So up and at him ! But be ye wise :  
Spare none alive to say how all befell,  
Send his accursed brats with him to Hell—  
But not his women. Soldiers of Christ, arise !

Was it the love of Christ that armed your hands  
And sent you forth to pillage, burn, and slay  
Through Macedon ? Is it for Him these lands  
Lie ruined ; that many an outraged Turkish girl,  
Aghast with shame, weeps endlessly all day,  
When you the banner of the Cross unfurl ?

## Giovanni Gualberto

DAY of God's death ! the hills were fair with  
spring

As up I rode, dark passions in my breast  
Unquenchable, that left my soul no rest,  
Nor peace, nor love for any lovely thing ;  
But on alone, amid that blossoming,  
And silently, with evil thoughts oppressed,  
I rode, my heart intent on my heart's quest.  
As in a dream I heard Christ's requiem ring.

Christ's requiem ! And when I drew my sword  
To have slain him, kneeling by a wayside shrine,  
The thought of that pale Body, and the woe  
Which it enthroned—perforce I let him go  
Forgiven ; and then the mercy of the Lord  
Gave healing to this stricken soul of mine.

# Sonnet

(FROM A SEQUENCE)

ONE time I dreamed : the starry heavens were  
bright

With falling meteors and revolving suns—  
Celestial lamps lit for the orisons  
Of seraphim through the long hours of night.  
The world was so remote, meseemed I might  
Hear voices from the archangelic thrones,  
And the divine, responsive benisons  
Echoing peace beyond each ultimate light.

But as I knelt in voiceless exaltation,  
Awed by the wonder of that holy place,  
Even in the midst of my deep adoration  
Darkness engulfed the blazing heavens' face,  
And my soul knew in that great isolation  
The silent cold of interstellar space.

# Sonnet

(FROM A SEQUENCE)

PERCHANCE sometime, a thousand years away,  
Your heart, new-born to life, will beat once more  
To the love my eager longing will outpour,  
All the sweet lifetime of a summer's day.  
The rose-fields stretch in crimson to the bay,  
The sunset towers of the cloud-hills soar  
Above the sea, the long waves reach the shore . . .  
Have you not guessed all that I dared not say ?

Will that time ever come ? How shall we know  
That we have shed before the same, sharp tears,  
Silently, passionately, long ago,  
Beyond the griefs that veil a thousand years ?  
Alas, dear love, whether for joy or pain,  
We've spent the days that never come again.

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